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Mr Wilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25-26 June 2009 to look at work in design and technology (D&T).

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with you, the subject leader for D&T, staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are good.

- Most students' attainment on entry to the school is below average.
- Students make good progress during Key Stage 3 to develop a secure understanding of the characteristics of materials and techniques and a high level of practical skills.
- By the end of Key Stage 4 students reach standards at GCSE which are above average. Unusual and original designing and making are good features of the work. Students achieve highly in electronics and textiles. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well. School records show that most students are making good progress, however poor attendance undermines the efforts of a small but significant proportion.
- Sixth formers work independently to model their ideas and use computer aided design (CAD). They have secure understanding of anthropometrics and ergonomics and apply this in their work.

- D&T makes a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. They enjoy D&T enormously and take pride in the skills and techniques they acquire. This is well demonstrated by the very high number of students who continue to study D&T at ages 14-19. Students act safely and are developing awareness of nutrition. They collaborate confidently and their behaviour and attitudes in lessons are good.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Teachers apply their specialist knowledge and good questioning skills effectively in lessons. Planning of lessons, marking and feedback to students are consistent across the teaching team. However some lessons lacked the pace and variety of the more effective ones.
- In one lesson the teacher's effective modelling was used exceptionally well to inspire and challenge students to reach high standards when making their own mechanical pop-up model. Students acquire good handicraft skills but have few opportunities to use computers to aid design and manufacture.
- Assessment processes are consistent. Students know what is expected of them and they understand the assessments being made.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- A good range of courses characterises the provision of D&T at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Students say they are confident and feel well prepared for Key Stage 4 courses. The use of client based projects is a good feature of sixth form courses. One student explained how this brought greater challenge and rigour to the work and he welcomed the opportunity this provided to act as a professional designer. The school is beginning to introduce sustainability through its work on recycling. Whilst this is developing well in the sixth form it has yet to be securely implemented in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 3.
- Schemes of work meet most National Curriculum requirements. The school has moved forward in developing teachers CAD skills. Opportunities for students to benefit from this investment and to develop their CAD skills are built into some projects in Years 7-9 and more so in Years 10-11 and post-16. Resources for computer aided manufacture and opportunities for students to use materials that respond to the environment are very thin and non existent in some areas of the subject. This limits the development of students' skills and understanding.
- Enrichment opportunities for students to develop their understanding of industrial practice and to meet and work with chefs, engineers and designers are too limited at Key Stage 3.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are good.

- Your support for D&T is good and is well demonstrated through small class sizes and the extensive provision and take-up of D&T at Key Stage 4. The inclusive nature of the school is demonstrated well in the provision of food ingredients to ensure all students are able to participate in D&T. However, the department has not kept pace with current manufacturing methods and some resource needs are not met.
- The subject leader provides good leadership and management. Systems of assessment, checking students' progress and health and safety are consistently applied. His classroom practice provides an effective model of best practice for colleagues. He has a clear and secure vision of what steps to take to continue the development of the department.
- Technicians are deployed well to support teaching and learning; their expert technical knowledge is used well and students readily turn to them to discuss manufacturing problems.

The extent to which the school promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and parents and carers

- The school has a secure vision for D&T and aims to modernise and prepare students for their role in a technologically advanced society. The school know that further work is required to bring this to fruition. Students, particularly in Key Stage 4, see the relevance of D&T to careers and to general life skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure students have opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of CAM and to use materials that respond to the environment
- improve opportunities to enable Key Stage 3 students to develop their understanding of industrial practice and meet and work with chefs, engineers and designers

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T in the school.

As explained in the previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector
Subject Adviser for Design and Technology